



**U.S. Department of Agriculture**  
**Natural Resources Conservation Service**  
**Commodity Credit Corporation**  
**Ecological Sciences Division**  
**Science and Technology Deputy Area**

**Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program**

The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program is authorized by section 1240R of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3839bb-5), as amended by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-246), and further amended by the Agricultural Act of 2014.

**Announcement No. USDANRCS-NHQ – VPA-HIP – 2014 – 01**

**For Fiscal Year 2014**

**Date Issued: (Insert Date of Publication)**

Applications must be submitted electronically via the Grants.gov Web site  
Details are provided under Part III

**ANNOUNCEMENT TYPE:** Announcement for Program Funding

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER:** USDA-NRCS\_NHQ – VPA-HIP – 2014 – 01

**CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE (CFDA) NUMBER:** 10.093

**DATE:** Applications must be received in Grants.gov by 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time) on June 16, 2014

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) is a competitive grants program authorized under section 1240R of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended (16 U.S.C. 3839bb-5), and is only available for State and Tribal Governments. Up to \$40 million of mandatory funding is available through fiscal years (FY) 2014-2018. For FY 2014, \$20 million will be initially available. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will consider making VPA-HIP funds available for obligations to prior-year approved proposals and new proposals.

This Announcement for Program Funding (APF) provides the objectives for projects, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for a VPA-HIP competitive grant.

The primary objective of the VPA-HIP is to encourage owners and operators of privately held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for wildlife dependent recreation, including hunting or fishing, under programs implemented by State or Tribal Governments.

Grantees that are States will have the grant amount reduced by 25 percent if opening dates for migratory bird hunting in the State are not consistent for residents and non-residents. This paragraph does not apply to grantees that are Tribal Governments.

The regulations at 7 CFR part 1455 govern the VPA-HIP, except that VPA-HIP will be administered under the general supervision and direction of the Vice President, Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), who is the Chief, NRCS; the Associate Chief for Conservation, NRCS; or NRCS designee.

## **Table of Contents**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Part I—Background and Program Authority                                | 4  |
| A. Background  | 4  |
| B. Authority   | 5  |
| Part II—Timetables, Eligibility, and Application Format Instructions   | 5  |
| A. Timetables  | 5  |
| B. Eligibility – Who may Submit an Application                         | 6  |
| C. Incomplete Applications   | 6  |
| D. Application and Budget Content Instructions                         | 6  |
| Part III—Application Delivery/Submission Instructions and Deliverables | 11 |
| A. Preparing and Submitting an Application via Grants.gov              | 11 |
| B. SF-424 Instructions   | 12 |
| Part IV—Application Review   | 12 |
| A. General   | 12 |
| B. Applications Should Address   | 12 |
| C. Evaluation Ranking/Scoring Criteria                                 | 13 |
| D. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality                           | 15 |
| E. Access to Review Information  | 16 |
| Part V—Grantee Responsibilities  | 16 |
| Part VI—Grant Administration and Information                           | 17 |
| A. Grant Administration Information                                    | 17 |
| B. Reports   | 19 |
| Part VII—General Provisions  | 21 |
| A. Cost Principles, Audit, and Administrative Requirements             | 21 |
| B. Method of Payment   | 21 |
| C. Additional Regulations  | 21 |
| D. Additional General Terms and Conditions                             | 22 |
| Part VIII—Supplemental Information                                     | 26 |
| A. Contacts  | 26 |
| B. Reference Links   | 26 |
| C. Definitions   | 27 |

## **Part I—Background and Program Authority**

### **A. Background**

**The VPA-HIP** provides an opportunity for State and Tribal Governments to apply for grants to encourage owners and operators of privately held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for wildlife dependent recreation, including hunting, fishing, and other compatible recreation and to improve fish and wildlife habitat on their land under programs administered by State or Tribal Governments.

Only State and Tribal Governments are eligible for VPA-HIP. Grants will be awarded through a competitive APF process. In submitting applications for a grant under the program, a State or Tribal Government must describe: (1) the benefits that the State or Tribal Government intends to achieve by encouraging public access to private farm and ranch land for hunting and fishing, (2) to the maximum extent practicable, other recreational purposes, and (3) the methods that will be used to achieve those benefits.

State and Tribal Governments may propose to use VPA-HIP grant funding to expand existing public access programs, create new public access programs, and provide incentives to improve habitat on enrolled public access program lands.

In approving applications and awarding grants under the program, NRCS will give priority to States and Tribal Governments that propose to:

- Maximize participation by offering a public access program likely to meet with widespread acceptance among landowners;
- Ensure that land enrolled under the State or Tribal Government program has appropriate wildlife habitat that benefit a variety of species;
- Strengthen wildlife habitat improvement efforts on land enrolled in a special Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) or other U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) program by providing incentives to increase public hunting and other recreational access on that land;
- Use additional Federal, State, Tribal Government, or private resources in carrying out the program; and
- Inform the public about the location of enrolled land.

To the extent that funds are available, NRCS, acting on behalf of the CCC, will award grants for applications found to be meritorious based on recommendations from an interagency review panel. There is no commitment by NRCS or CCC to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of grant awards.

Grants for individual VPA-HIP applications will be limited to grant periods lasting no more than 3 years. Funding will be obligated to States or Tribal Governments with accepted applications and completed financial agreements and related documentation.

Grants to any individual State or Tribe will be no more than \$2 million per Federal fiscal year and no less than \$75,000 per Federal fiscal year. Actual disbursement to States of Federal funds can occur in subsequent Federal fiscal out-years within the grant period. States and Tribal Governments can expend received funds throughout and beyond the grant period provided that obligations for payment were incurred during the grant period.

Projects will be reviewed annually for progress to determine level of and continuation of funding. For projects in their third year, applications for renewals/continuation of funding will not be accepted. Grantees will be required to reapply with submission of a new application.

## **B. Authority**

The VPA-HIP is authorized by section 1240R of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3839bb-5), as amended by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-246), and further amended by the Agricultural Act of 2014.

## **Part II—Timetables, Eligibility, and Application Format Instructions**

### **A. Timetables**

**Due Date:** VPA-HIP applications must be received in Grants.gov by 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time) on June 16, 2014.

**Late Submission:** VPA-HIP applications submitted after the due date will not be considered for funding.

## **B. Eligibility – Who May Submit an Application**

Only a State or Tribal Government may apply for a VPA-HIP grant. Applications received by an individual or entity that is not a State or Tribal Government will not be considered.

A State or Tribal Government must include all proposed activities under a single application per APF. If multiple applications are received from an applicant during a single APF, only one application per State or Tribal Government will be approved for VPA-HIP funding per APF solicitation. The applicant is the individual State or Tribe. Any grant application from any unit of the State or Tribal Government should be reviewed and prioritized at the State or Tribal level before submission to NRCS for consideration.

## **C. Incomplete Applications**

Incomplete applications will not be considered for funding. However, if time permits, incomplete applications may be returned and be resubmitted.

## **D. Application and Budget Content Instructions**

1. Application Content Instructions. Each application must contain the following elements:
  - (a) Title page, which includes:
    - (i) Program Name. Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program;
    - (ii) CFDA Number. 10.093;
    - (iii) Project Title. New or existing State or Tribal Government public access program name;
    - (iv) Submitted By. State or Tribal Government submitting application; and
    - (v) Date. Date the proposal was finalized by State or Tribal Government prior to submission to USDA NRCS for consideration.
  - (b) Table of contents.
  - (c) Executive summary, one-page in length, which includes:
    - (i) Activities. Provide a summary of the application that briefly describes activities proposed to be funded under the grant; and

- (ii) Objectives, funding, performance, and other resources. Include objectives and tasks to be accomplished; the amount of funding requested; how the work will be performed; whether organizational staff, consultants, or contractors will be used; and whether other resources will be used.
- (d) Eligibility certification that certifies both that the applicant is a State or Tribal Government (including units thereof) and that the individual submitting the application is acting in a representative capacity on behalf of the State or Tribal Government.
- (e) Application narrative that must include, but is not limited, to the following:
  - (i) Project Title. The title of the proposed project must be brief (not to exceed 75 characters) yet describe the essentials of the project.
  - (ii) Information Sheet. A separate one-page information sheet listing each of the program evaluation criteria referenced in the application, followed by the page numbers of all relevant material and documentation contained in the application that address or support the criteria.
  - (iii) Objectives of the project. This section must include the following:
    - (A) A description of how the VPA-HIP funding will be used to encourage public access to private farm, ranch, and forest land for hunting, fishing, and other compatible recreational purposes.
    - (B) A description of the methods that will be used to achieve the provisions of paragraph (A) above.
    - (C) A description of how and to what extent the proposed program will meet with widespread acceptance among landowners, including strategic marketing and communications efforts, such as “Respected Access is Open Access,” or similar educational and outreach campaigns to be used to mitigate landowner apprehension about making their land available for public access.
    - (D) A detailed description of how and to what extent the land enrolled will benefit or increase appropriate wildlife habitat, including descriptions of location of public access areas and overlays with existing conservation initiatives or efforts including those supported by USDA.
    - (E) A description of how program funds are planned to be used to improve or stimulate the restoration and protection of those habitats, if applicable.

- (F) A detailed description of how and to what extent outreach and technical assistance will be provided to private landowners to encourage and support participation in conservation efforts to benefit wildlife habitat on participating lands.
  - (G) A detailed description of the extent to which additional Federal, State, Tribal Government, or private resources will be leveraged to carry out State or Tribal Government public access program activities.
  - (H) A detailed description of how the public will be made aware of the location of the land enrolled in the State and Tribal Government public access program.
  - (I) A description of the estimated economic benefits to local and regional economies from a proposed project.
- (iv) Work plan. Applications must include how VPA-HIP funds will be used to facilitate specific tasks associated with State or Tribal Government public access program delivery. The work plan should address landowner outreach; notification of hunters, fishermen, and other recreational users of the availability of expanded opportunities; identification of additional staff and key personnel to be involved with administration of the grant; and the evaluation methods to be used to determine the success of public access program delivery, in general, and those specific tasks and overall objectives associated with the VPA-HIP grant. The work plan must include a budget providing a breakdown of the estimated costs associated with VPA-HIP activities and allocating these costs to each of the tasks to be undertaken. Additional funds from Federal, State, Tribal Government, or private resources, if any, as well as grant funds and resources provided in kind must be accounted for in the budget.
  - (v) Performance evaluation criteria. Applications must include how the State or Tribal Government will measure and monitor accomplishments associated with VPA-HIP funds and meet the stated goals for the State or Tribal program including, but not limited to, landowner and recreationist participation, acres opened for access, economic benefits, wildlife habitat benefits, public outreach, and cost-effectiveness.
  - (vi) Other similar efforts. The applicant must describe its previous accomplishments and outcomes in public access activities, if any.
  - (vii) Qualifications of personnel. Applicants must describe the knowledge, skills, and abilities of key staff engaged in the delivery of the VPA-HIP and indicate if staff is to be full- or part-time employees or contract personnel.



2. Budget Content Instructions. For detailed budget breakdown, use form SF-424A, Budget Information – Non-Construction Programs ([Form](#), [Instructions](#)). All sections are to be completed, as needed, including:

(a) Section B regarding:

- (i) Personnel. Indicate the estimated costs of full- or part-time employees of the State or Tribal Government involved in public access program delivery. Actual identification of personnel involved in program delivery should be described in the application narrative.
- (ii) Fringe benefits. Indicate the rates/amounts in conformance with normal accounting procedures. Explain what costs are covered in this category and the basis of the rate computations.
- (iii) Travel. State the purpose of the trip and itemize the estimated travel costs to show the number of trips required, destinations, number of people traveling, per diem rates, airfare, cost of transportation, and miscellaneous expenses for each trip. Calculations of other special transportation costs (such as charges for use of applicant-owned vehicles or vehicle rental costs) should also be shown. Provide details on any specific item which represents a significant portion of the requested funding.
- (iv) Equipment. Tangible, non-expendable personal property having a useful life of more than 1 year and an acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more per unit. Purchase of equipment directly related to facilitating and managing public access to hunting and fishing opportunities such as fence and gate modifications, kiosks, ramps for handicapped or disabled, and designated parking or boat launching areas is authorized. Such equipment helps control access and related traffic and use, protects and enhances appropriate fish and wildlife habitat, and maximizes landowner participation by alleviating many potential participating landowner issues, concerns, and apprehensions. Title to non-expendable personal property must be vested with the recipient or the Federal Government as determined in the terms and conditions. Under no circumstances will property title be vested in a sub-tier recipient.
- (v) Supplies. Show the costs of all supplies necessary for achieving the objectives of the project.
- (vi) Contractual. Show costs associated with external financial agreements such as with landowners participating in the State or Tribal public access program, consultants, technical service providers, and others involved in program delivery, monitoring, and evaluation.
- (vii) Construction. Costs of the installation of, but not limited to, gates, cattle guards, fencing, and parking areas.

- (viii) Other direct costs. Itemize the different types of costs not included elsewhere.
  - (ix) Total direct charges. Totals for items (i) – (viii).
  - (x) Indirect charges (overhead). Show the proposed rate, cost base, and proposed amount for indirect costs based on the cost principles applicable to the applicant's organization. Applicants wishing to claim indirect costs must submit a federally approved indirect cost rate or an indirect cost rate proposal with the application package.
  - (xi) Amount proposed. Total items (ix) and (x).
  - (xii) Program income. Gross income incidental to the accomplishment of the approved grant purposes and received by the grantee directly generated by a grant supported activity or earned only as a result of the grant agreement during the grant period. Three methods—deduction, addition, and cost-sharing or matching—of accounting for program income are acceptable. However, if a method other than deduction is to be used, it must be identified in the grant agreement.
  - (xiii) Detailed budget narrative. Provide a detailed narrative in support of the budget for the project broken down by each project year. Discuss how the budget specifically supports the proposed activities. Explain how items are essential to achieving project objectives budget. Justify the project cost effectiveness and include justification for personnel and consultant salaries with a description of duties. In addition, any subcontractors and consultants must also submit a statement of work. The budget narrative should support the Federal funds requested and the cost share.
- (b) Section C regarding amounts of non-Federal resources that will be used on the program funded by the grant. If in-kind contributions are included, provide a brief explanation on a separate sheet.
3. Assurances: Standard Form (SF) 424B - Assurances, Non-Construction Programs. All applications must include this document ([Form](#), [Instructions](#)). In addition, applicants, by signing and submitting an application, assure and certify that they are in compliance with the following Federal regulations:

- (a) 2 CFR part 417, [Government-wide Debarment and Suspension \(Non-procurement\)](#)
- (b) 7 CFR part 3018, [New Restrictions on Lobbying](#)
- (c) 2 CFR part 421, [Government-wide Requirements for Drug Free Workplace \(Financial Assistance\)](#)

The following items must be obtained prior to entering into an agreement with the Federal Government. Applicants are encouraged to apply early for their Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS)/System for Award Management (SAM).

4. DUNS Number. A Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) DUNS number is a unique nine-digit sequence recognized as the universal standard for identifying and keeping track of over 70 million businesses worldwide. Applicants must obtain a DUNS Number. Information on how to obtain a DUNS number can be found at: <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform> or by calling 1-866-705-5711. Please note that the registration may take up to 14 business days to complete.

SAM Number. Official U.S. Government system that consolidated the capabilities of CCR/FedReg, ORCA, and EPLS. To register, go to: <https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/>. Please allow a minimum of 5 days to complete the SAM registration.

### **Part III—Application Delivery/Submission Instructions and Deliverables**

#### **A. Preparing and Submitting an Application via Grants.gov**

Applications must be received in Grants.gov by 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time) on June 16, 2014.

Please note that the electronic submission system is relatively complex for first-time users and involves several preliminary registrations steps to be taken before the application can be submitted (go to [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) and click on Applicants, then click on Get Registered).

If you have completed a prior application, you may already have completed the registration process. Please allow sufficient time for the application to be submitted electronically and for possible computer delays.

An application received after the closing date and time will not be considered.

For registered applicants to submit a grant application:

1. Go to [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) (applications will ONLY be accepted from this site). Information about submitting an application using Grants.gov is located on the Grants.gov site with supplementary materials.

2. Select the Applicants tab.
3. On the Apply for Grants heading, click on Apply for Grants Opportunities.
4. Step 1: Download a Grant Application Package by searching the CFDA number 10.093.

#### **B. SF-424 Instructions**

All new and continuation/revision applications must contain the completed form SF-424 Application for Federal Assistance ([Form](#), [Instructions](#)) and project/budget narrative.

**Note:** By submitting an application for VPA-HIP, you are certifying to be the authorized representative of State or Tribal Government.

### **Part IV—Application Review**

#### **A. General**

Evaluated applications will be ranked based on merit. Each application will be evaluated in a two-part process:

1. Each application will be screened to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this announcement and the regulations at 7 CFR part 1455.
2. Applications that meet these administrative requirements will be evaluated by an interagency review panel.

The interagency reviewers will be selected based upon knowledge, skills, training, and experience in relevant fields. The interagency review panel will conduct a merit review based on the evaluation criteria. The input from this panel will be used by CCC to determine which applications will be recommended for funding. The Chief of NRCS will make the final recommendation for awarding grants.

#### **B. Applications Should Address:**

1. A description of how the VPA-HIP funding will be used to encourage public access to private farm, ranch, and forest land for hunting, fishing, and other compatible recreational purposes.
2. A description of the methods that will be used to achieve public access to private farm, ranch, and forest land for hunting, fishing, and other compatible recreational purposes.

3. A description of how and to what extent the proposed program will meet with widespread acceptance among landowners including strategic marketing and communications efforts and educational and outreach campaigns to be used to mitigate landowner apprehension about making their land available for public access.
4. A description about how program funds are planned to be used to improve those habitats, if applicable.
5. A detailed description of how and to what extent outreach and technical assistance will be made to participants in existing USDA conservation programs to strengthen wildlife habitat on lands enrolled and to have such lands made available for public access.
6. A detailed description of how any additional Federal, State, Tribal Government, or private resources, if any, will be leveraged to carry out State or Tribal Government public access program activities.
7. A detailed description of how the public will be made aware of the location of the land enrolled in the State and Tribal Government public access program.

### **C. Evaluation Ranking/Scoring Criteria**

The ranking/scoring evaluation criteria noted below will be used in reviewing applications submitted in response to this announcement.

1. Incomplete or non-responsive applications will not be evaluated. Applicants may revise their applications and re-submit them prior to the deadline if there is sufficient time.
2. Applications for grants for the VPA-HIP will be evaluated and scored using the following criteria:
  - (a) Outcomes. The application will be evaluated to determine whether and to what extent the project identifies clear and measurable outcome goals, including the promotion and expansion of public access for hunting, fishing, and other compatible wildlife-dependent recreation; the protection, restoration, or improvement of wildlife habitat and wildlife populations; and the economic benefits resulting from enhanced recreational opportunities. (0-15 points)
  - (b) Project description and feasibility. The application will be evaluated on the extent and quality to which the applicant demonstrates a reasonable approach to locating and making privately-held farm, ranch, and forest land available for public access; notifying the public of the availability of expanded wildlife dependent recreational opportunity; and having sufficient resources and capability to complete the project in a timely manner. (0-15 points)

- (c) Widespread acceptance and maximizing participation of landowners. The application will be evaluated based on the applicant's plan for encouraging the participation of owners and operators of privately-held farm, ranch, and forest land and making such lands available for public access, including outreach to address landowner issues, concerns, and apprehensions, and related efforts to encourage responsible behavior of those provided access. (0-25 points)
- (d) Appropriate wildlife habitat. The applicant will be evaluated on demonstrated expertise in evaluating and assessing fish and wildlife habitat with respect to providing public hunting, fishing, and other compatible recreational opportunities and establishing, maintaining, or enhancing appropriate habitat on program lands made accessible to the public. An evaluation of the detailed description of how and to what extent the land enrolled will have appropriate wildlife habitat, including descriptions of location of public access areas and overlays with existing conservation efforts, will be conducted. (0-25 points)
- (e) Strengthening wildlife habitat for lands under CREP and other USDA conservation programs and initiatives. The application will be evaluated to determine level of outreach and incentives to increase public hunting, fishing, and other compatible recreational access on land enrolled under CREP and other existing USDA conservation programs and initiatives. States and Tribes without existing USDA conservation program agreements can describe their own conservation projects, programs, and activities and how they are complementary with the VPA-HIP purposes. They can also describe how participation in the VPA-HIP will expand and accelerate participation in USDA conservation programs and initiatives. (0-20 points)
- (f) Additional private, Federal, State, or Tribal Government resources. While there are no matching requirements of States or Tribal Governments associated with VPA-HIP funding, resource commitment of partners is important to the long-term success of State and Tribal Government public access programs. The extent to which the applicant has identified and established relationships with the partners necessary to achieve the project's goals will be evaluated. Applications that demonstrate additional resources will receive more points, all else being equal, than those that do not. (0-25 points)
- (g) Making available the location of enrolled land. The application will be evaluated to determine how the project proposes to make available to the public the location of the land enrolled. (0-25 points)
- (h) Performance evaluation criteria. The application will be evaluated to determine whether the applicant has included outcome-based performance measures. (0-10 points)
- (i) Delivery. The application will be evaluated to determine whether the applicant has a track record in implementing public access or similar programs, or in the

absence of an actual track record, the capacity to implement a public access program. The applicant's potential for delivering an effective public access program and the expected effects of that program will also be assessed. (0-10 points)

- (j) Work plan and budget. The work plan will be reviewed for detailed actions and an accompanying timetable for implementing the components of the application. Clear, logical, realistic, and efficient plans will result in a higher score. Budgets will be reviewed for completeness and whether and to what extent additional resources were committed by Federal, State, Tribal Government, or private resources. (0-10 points)
  - (k) Qualifications of those performing the tasks. The application will be reviewed to determine that key personnel, such as the State or Tribal Government public access program manager, fiscal officer, or Federal aid coordinator collectively have the appropriate knowledge, skills, and abilities with respect to hunting, fishing, and other compatible wildlife-dependent recreation on privately-held farm, ranch, and forest land, funds control, grants management, performance monitoring and evaluation, and other activities relevant to the success of the proposed public access program. (0-10 points)
- 3. After all applications have been evaluated using the evaluation criteria and scored in accordance with the point allocation specified in the APF, a list of all applications in ranked order, together with funding level recommendations, will be submitted to the Chief, NRCS.
  - 4. Acknowledgement of Submission. Grants.gov provides date and time stamps on applications submitted through its Web site. An applicant who does not receive acknowledgement within 30 days of their submission from Grants.gov, but believes he or she submitted a timely application, must contact the NRCS VPA-HIP technical contact within 30 days of submission deadline. Failure to do so will result in the application not being considered.
  - 5. Withdrawal. Applications may be withdrawn by written notice at any time before selections are made. Applications may be withdrawn by the applicant or by authorized representative of the State or Tribal Government.

#### **D. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality**

During the interagency review process, care will be taken to prevent actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may affect review or evaluation.

Names of an individual State or Tribal Government submitting an application, application content, and interagency review evaluations will be kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. In addition, the identities of the interagency reviewers will remain confidential throughout the entire review process. Therefore, the names of the reviewers will not be released to applicants.

#### **E. Access to Review Information**

Copies of an individual State or Tribal Government's reviews, not including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the panel comments will be available to the applicant after the review process has been completed.

#### **Part V—Grantee Responsibilities**

Before receiving grant funding, the grantee will be required to sign an agreement similar in form and substance to the APF. The agreement will require the grantee to commit to do all of the following:

- Take all practicable steps to develop continuing sources of financial support from other Federal, State, Tribal Government, or private resources;
- Make arrangements for the monitoring and evaluation of privately-held farm, ranch, and forest land enrolled in public access programs as a result of VPA-HIP; and
- Provide an accounting for the VPA-HIP funding received by the grantee under this subpart.

Grantees will be required to monitor funds or services as specified below and must agree to that monitoring before grant funds are awarded.

The grantee must certify that the grant funds and services will not be used for ineligible purposes. Specifically, grant funds and services may not be used to:

- Duplicate current services; however, grant funds may be used to expand the level of effort or extend services beyond what is currently being provided;
- Pay costs of preparing the application for funding under the VPA-HIP;
- Pay costs of the project incurred prior to the date of grant approval;
- Fund political activities;
- Pay any judgment or debt owed to the United States;
- Pay for the design, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of a building or facility (including a processing facility);
- Purchase, rent, or pay for the installation of fixed equipment, other than property identification signs, gates, cattle guards, fencing, kiosks, boat ramps, or parking areas directly associated with public access designed to inform and manage such public access,



maintain appropriate wildlife habitat, enhance quality of the outdoor experience, and mitigate adverse environmental impact;

- Pay for the repair of privately owned vehicles; and
- Pay for research and development not directly related to quantifying the performance of VPA-HIP and lands enrolled with funding from the VPA-HIP.

Grantees that are States will have the grant amount reduced by 25 percent if opening dates for migratory bird hunting in the State are not consistent for residents and non-residents. This does not apply to grantees that are Tribal Governments.

Failure of the grantee to execute a grant agreement in a timely fashion, as determined by the CCC, will be construed to be a withdrawal from VPA-HIP.

## **Part VI—Grant Administration and Information**

### **A. Grant Administration Information**

#### **1. General**

Grants will be made to the eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this announcement.

All funds granted under this announcement will be expended solely for the purpose for which the funds are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, the regulations at 7 CFR part 1455, the terms and conditions of the grant, the applicable Federal cost principles, the Department's regulations at 7 CFR part 3016, and the provisions of 16 U.S.C. 3839bb-5.

Grant recipients are responsible for managing the day-to-day operations of the agreement and supported activities to assure compliance with applicable Federal requirements and performance goals are being achieved. Recipient monitoring must cover each program, function, or activity.

Upon notification of selection, grantees will be notified of documentation required for receipt of grant.

## **2. Reporting Requirements for Grantees**

Grantees must provide the following to NRCS:

- (1) A Financial Status Report listing expenditures according to agreed-upon budget categories as specified in the grant document.
- (2) Annual performance reports that compare accomplishments to the objectives stated in the application, and that must also:
  - (a) Identify all tasks completed to date and provide documentation supporting the reported results.
  - (b) Discuss the problems or delays that may affect completion of the project if the original schedule provided in the work plan is not being met.
  - (c) List objectives for the next reporting period.
  - (d) Discuss compliance with special conditions on the use of grant funds. Reports are due as provided in Section B below.
- (3) Final project performance reports, inclusive of supporting documentation. The final performance report is due within 90 days of the completion of the project.

## **3. Changes in Project Plans**

1. The permissible changes by the grantee in the approved project grant will be limited to changes in methodology, techniques, or other similar aspects of the project to expedite achievement of the project's approved goals. If the grantee is uncertain as to whether a change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to NRCS for a final determination.
2. Changes in approved goals or objectives requested by the grantee must be approved in writing by NRCS prior to effecting such changes. In no event will requests for such changes be approved if they are outside the scope of the original approved project.
3. Changes in project leadership or the replacement or reassignment of other key project personnel must be forwarded by the grantee to NRCS.
4. No transfers of actual performance of substantive programmatic work, in whole or in part, or provisions for payment of funds, whether or not Federal funds are involved, will be approved unless approved in writing by NRCS prior to effecting such transfers, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of the grant.

5. Changes in Project Period: Project periods are for 3 years. However, the project period may be extended by NRCS without additional financial support for such additional period(s) as NRCS determines may be necessary to complete or fulfill the purposes of an approved project, but in no case will the total project period exceed 5 years. Any extension of time will be conditioned upon prior request by the grantee and approval in writing by NRCS, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of the grant. If additional funding is needed, grantees will be required to reapply with submission of a new application.
6. Changes in Approved Budget: Unless stated otherwise in the terms and conditions of grant, changes in an approved budget must be requested by the grantee and approved in writing by NRCS prior to instituting such changes if the revision will involve transfers or expenditures of amounts requiring prior approval.

## B. Reports

The following reports will be required from all grant recipients:

| Report  | Due Date   |
|---|--|
| Form SF-425, Federal Financial Report (Quarterly) | 45 calendar days after the end of each Federal fiscal quarter or: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• February 15</li><li>• May 15</li><li>• August 15</li><li>• November 15</li></ul> |
| Performance Reports                               | 90 calendar days after: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The end of each Federal fiscal year or December 31; and</li><li>• Completion date.</li></ul>                               |
| Form SF-425, Federal Financial Report (Final)     | 90 calendar days after completion date.  |

### 1. Cash Management and Financial Reporting Requirements

- (a) Form SF-425 ([Form](#), [Instructions](#)) is required quarterly and is due 45 days after the end of each fiscal quarter until the final Federal Financial Report is submitted.

Within 45 calendar days after the end of each Federal fiscal quarter, the SF-425 must be submitted by mail to the NRCS administrative contact under Part VIII.

If after 45 calendar days recipient has not submitted a report, the account will be placed in a manual review status. Funds may be withheld for accounts with delinquent reports.

Report unused grant funds and interest earned using Section 12 of the SF-425.

- (b) The grantee will submit a final SF-425 no later than 90 calendar days after the grant agreement completion date and promptly return any unobligated Federal cash advances.
- (c) Revision to the final SF-425 will be considered only when the revision results in a balance due to the Government; the grantee must submit a revised final SF-425 and refund the excess payment whenever the overcharge is discovered, no matter how long the lapse of time since the original due date of the report.

## **2. Performance Reports**

Annually and upon grant completion, recipients of grants under this program are responsible for managing and monitoring the project, program, sub-award, function, or activity supported by the grant. Performance reports must generally contain brief information that compares accomplishments to the objectives stated in the application and that also:

- (a) Documents the number of public access viewing days made available by the grant funds;
- (b) Identifies all tasks completed to date of report and provide documentation supporting the reported results;
- (c) Reports problems or delays that may affect completion of the project;
- (d) Lists objectives for the next reporting period; and
- (e) Discusses compliance with special conditions on the use of grant funds.

All reports submitted to NRCS and CCC will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law.

## **Part VII—General Provisions**

### **A. Cost Principles, Audit, and Administrative Requirements**

The grant recipient is subject to the following OMB circulars and regulations that are incorporated herein by reference. Copies of these circulars can be obtained at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars/index.html>.

1. OMB Circular A-87, Cost Principles for State, Local, and Indian Tribal Governments.
2. OMB Circular A-102, Grants and Cooperative Agreements with State and Local Governments.
3. OMB Circular A-133, Audits of States, Local Governments, and Non-Profit Organizations.

### **B. Method of Payment**

The grant will be disbursed by the National Finance Center in New Orleans, Louisiana, on behalf of NRCS, National Headquarters, Washington, D.C., using electronic funds transfer to the grant recipient's bank account. The grant recipient must complete the required form (provided at award time), and return the form to NRCS before disbursement can be made.

### **C. Additional Regulations**

In addition to the regulations governing VPA-HIP at 7 CFR part 1455, this grant is also subject to the following additional regulations, as applicable:

1. 7 CFR part 3016, Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments.
2. 7 CFR part 3017, Government-wide Debarment and Suspension (non-procurement) and Government-wide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Grants).
3. 7 CFR part 3018, New Restrictions on Lobbying.
4. 7 CFR part 3052, Audits of States, Local Governments, and Non-profit Organizations.

## **D. Additional General Terms and Conditions**

### Advance

Grantees must use the SF-270 Request for Advance or Reimbursement form ([Form and Instructions](#)) to request advances.

### Appeals

Appeals will be handled according to regulations at 7 CFR parts 11 and 14.

### Audit

Grantees must comply with the audit requirements of 7 CFR part 3052. The audit requirements apply to the years in which grant funds are received and years in which work is accomplished using grant funds.

### Availability of USDA Information

Section 2004 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 and section 1619 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 describe the type of information that can be shared by USDA with State and Tribal Governments. USDA is prohibited from disclosing information about an agricultural operation, its land, its farming or conservation practices, and any geospatial information. Information may be released to any person or agency that is working in cooperation with USDA to provide financial or technical assistance to a producer or to respond to a disease or pest threat. Payment information, aggregated or statistical data, and information that a producer consents to release may be disclosed. However, producer consent to disclose information cannot be a pre-requisite for participation in a USDA program. NRCS will cooperate with State and Tribal Governments as authorized to facilitate efficient and effective delivery of VPA-HIP.

### Civil Rights

The CCC prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. The VPA-HIP will also be administered in accordance with all other applicable civil rights law.

### Close-out Procedure

Upon submittal of the final SF-425 to NRCS, close-out procedures will be initiated for the agreement. Each agreement is a separate action and will be closed out in accordance with the applicable general provisions.

### Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility

Unless the terms and conditions of the grant provide otherwise, the grantee may not, in whole or in part, delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of grant funds.

### Environmental Review

The purpose of the environmental review process for VPA-HIP is to evaluate potential environmental impacts of a new or expanded public access program provided by the State or Tribal Government.

After an application has been selected and before the balance of grant funds are made available, the State or Tribal Government applying for VPA-HIP funds must either:

- (i) Submit to NRCS an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that has already been completed which addresses the current public access program. Consistent with the regulations at 40 CFR § 1506.3 after thorough review of the submitted National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document, NRCS will determine if it complies with the provisions of NEPA, 42 U.S.C. 4321-4347, the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR parts 1500-1508), and NRCS' environmental quality regulations for compliance with NEPA (7 CFR part 799) and the agency will adopt the documentation as such; or
- (ii) Prepare a Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) in a manner consistent with the provisions of NEPA, 42 U.S.C. 4321-4347, the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR parts 1500-1508), and NRCS regulations for compliance with NEPA (7 CFR part 799). Consistent with the regulations at 40 CFR § 1501.4 ( c ), the PEA will be used to determine if the receipt of Federal funds will constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment and if an EIS needs to be prepared.

### Exceptions

The CCC may, in individual cases, make an exception to any requirement or provision of the regulations at 7 CFR part 1455 provided that any such exception is not inconsistent with any applicable law or opinion of the Comptroller General, and provided further that the CCC determines that the application of the requirement or provision would adversely affect the Federal Government's interest.

### Fiscal Integrity

The recipient will notify NRCS of any significant problems relating to the administrative or financial aspects of the grant, such as misappropriation of Federal funds.

### Inspection

Grantees must permit periodic inspection of the program operations by a CCC representative, as determined by CCC.

### Modification Authority; Change in Scope or Objectives

The grant agreement may be modified in writing by mutual consent of NRCS and the grantee. However, the grantee must obtain prior approval from NRCS for any change to the scope or objectives of the approved project. Failure to obtain prior approval of changes to the scope of work or budget may result in suspension, termination, or recovery of grant funds.

### Performance Evaluation

The CCC will incorporate performance criteria in grant documentation and will annually evaluate the progress and performance of grant awardees.

### Program Income

Any program income will be deducted from total allowable costs to determine the net allowable costs before calculating the Government's share of reimbursable costs as provided in 43 CFR 12.65(g)(1) (for A-102 recipients) or 43 CFR 12.924(b)(3) (for A-110 recipients).

### Publication Requirements

Publication of project accomplishments or any portion, thereof, is subject to prior review.

Appropriate credits to NRCS must be in any formally published article(s) providing NRCS does not otherwise feel it appropriate to issue a disclaimer.

### Suspend, Terminate, or Require Refund

The CCC may elect to suspend or terminate a grant, in whole or in part, or funding of a particular work plan activity, and require refund of part or the entire grant, with interest, where CCC has determined:

1. That the grantee or sub-recipient of grant funds has demonstrated insufficient progress in complying with the terms of the grant agreement.
2. The opening dates for migratory bird hunting in a State have been changed so as to be not consistent for residents and non-residents during the term of the grant.
3. There is reasonable evidence that shows joint funding has not been or will not be forthcoming on a timely basis.



4. Such other cause as CCC identifies in writing to the grantee based on reasonable evidence (including but not limited to the use of Federal grant funds for ineligible purposes).

#### Patents and Inventions

Allocation of rights to patents and inventions must be in accordance with 7 CFR § 3019.36. USDA receives a royalty-free license for Federal Government use, reserves the right to require the patentee to license others in certain circumstances, and requires that anyone exclusively licensed to sell the invention in the United States must normally manufacture it domestically.

#### Freedom of Information and Privacy Act

Applicants should be aware that some or all of the information submitted in their application may be subject to public disclosure through the Freedom of Information Act. Applicants are advised to mark confidential information, such as proprietary information, to prevent disclosure.

## Part VIII—Supplemental Information

### A. Contacts

#### For Further Information Contact:

##### Technical Provisions Contact:

Terrell Erickson  
Director, Ecological Sciences Division  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW.  
Room 6160 South Building  
Washington, D.C. 20250-0513  
Telephone: (202) 720-5992  
Email: Terrell.Erickson1@wdc.usda.gov

##### Administrative Contact:

Shelia Leonard  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
1400 Independence Ave, SW.  
Room 5220 South Building  
Washington, D.C. 20250  
Telephone: (202) 720-8644  
Email: shelia.leonard@wdc.usda.gov

##### For questions related to Grants.gov:

Telephone: (800) 518-4726  
Email: [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov)

### B. Reference Links

For access to grants.gov application Web site: [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov)

For access to Grants.gov applicant resources:  
<http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-resources.html>

For access to NRCS' Web site: [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)

### C. Definitions

In addition to the definitions for the VPA-HIP under the regulations at 7 CFR part 1455, the following also apply:

Tribal Government refers to federally-recognized tribes as defined in section 4(e) of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 450b(e)).

State agency is any State agency, department, board, commission, or other government entity which is responsible for the management of fish and wildlife resources within a State.

State or State government is any of the 50 States, District of Columbia, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Virginia Islands, Guam, and Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands or any agency or instrumentality of a State exclusive of local governments.

*Any inconsistency between the original printed document and the disk or electronic document will be resolved by giving precedence to the printed document.*

—END OF PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENT—

Signed this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ in Washington, D.C.

Jason A. Weller  
Vice President, Commodity Credit Corporation and  
Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service